

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03

AID-05 IGA-02 MC-02 OMB-01 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

DODE-00 SSO-00 /069 W

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P R 071315Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 2766

INFO AMEMBASSY DOHA QATAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDA SAUDI ARABIA

AMEMBASSY LONDON UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 0130

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : MARR, PFOR, BA, QA, US

SUBJECT : BAHRAINI REQUEST FOR LCVPS

REFERENCE : (A) DOHA 113 (NOTAL), (B) STATE 22972 (NOTAL),
(C) MANAMA 049 (NOTAL)

1. STATE REFTEL WAS TACTICALLY USEFUL IN PROVIDING PEG FOR EMBASSY OFFICER TO APPROACH BDF CHIEF OF STAFF ONCE MORE TO PROBE FURTHER BDF'S INTENDED USE OF THE UP TO TWELVE LCVPS IT HAS INFORMALLY REQUESTED TO PURCHASE FROM THE U.S. CHIEF OF STAFF INSISTED BDF'S SOLE INTEREST IN LCVPS IS TO ASSIST IN POSSIBLE RELIEF OPERATIONS ON OUTLYING ISLANDS IN CASE OF EMERGENCIES, ARGUING THAT LCVPS WERE, IN BDF'S OPINION, CRAFT BEST SUITED FOR THIS PURPOSE BECAUSE OF THEIR TOUGHNESS AND ABILITY TO NAVIGATE IN SHALLOW WATERS. HE SPECIFICALLY DENIED THAT BDF HAD ANY AGGRESSIVE INTENT IN MIND AND CLAIMED BDF HAD NO THOUGHT EVEN OF CONDUCTING COMBAT TRAINING IN LCVPS. CHIEF OF STAFF ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT IF BDF POSSESSED LCVPS AND FLET NEED TO MOVE TROOPS, IT WOULD NOT HESITATE TO DO SO BUT HE ARGUED THE SMALL NUMBER OF LCVPS DESIRED AND AVAILABILITY OF OTHER MEANS OF TRANSPORT SUGGEST TROOP MOVING CAPABILITY WAS NOT WHAT BDF HAD IN MIND IN PROPOSED LCVPS ACQUISITION.

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2. SUBSEQUENTLY AMBASSADOR CONSULTED WITH UK AMBASSADOR WHO SAID BDF HAS APPROACHED BRITISH TO PURCHASE CRAFT SIMILAR TO OUR LCVP'S. BRITISH HAD GIVEN BDF LIST OF COMMERCIAL FIRMS MANUFACTURING THEM. BRITISH AMBASSADOR ASSUMES BDF'S INTEREST IN SUCH CRAFT IS TO PROVIDE TRANSPORT PERMITTING BAHRAIN TO KEEP POLICE FORT AT HAWAR ISLAND MANNED AND SUPPLIED AT LOW TIDE. BRITISH AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT MAINTAINING A POLICE PRESENCE AT HAWAR SEEMS ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF MAINTAINING BAHRAINI CLAIM TO ISLAND. HE NOTED THAT EXISTENCE OF PIER FACILITIES AT THE ONLY OTHER OUTLYING ISLAND OF SIGNIFICANT INTEREST TO GOB, JIDDA, MADE LCVP TYPE CRAFT UNNECESSARY FOR SEA TRANSPORT EXCEPT TO HAWAR. BRITISH AMBASSADOR PROFESSED TO BE AS PUZZLED AS WE AS TO WHY BDF WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE ESSENTIALLY POLICE FUNCTION OF HANDLING EMERGENCIES OR PROVIDING LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AT HAWAR. HE ALSO NOTED BRITISH CONCERN RE BDF'S TENDENCY TO WANDER OFF ON ITS OWN IN SEEKING EQUIPMENT FOR WHICH IT LACKED CABINET APPROVAL. AMBASSADOR MADE IT QUITE CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT HMG IN NO WAY REGARDS LCVP TYPE CRAFT AS STRICTLY MILITARY AND HENCE HAS NO HESITATION IN SELLING SUCH BOATS ON COMMERCIAL BASIS TO BDF OR ANYONE ELSE IN BAHRAIN WILLING TO PAY FOR THEM.

3. AMBASSADOR'S COMMENT: I CONTINUE TO SUSPECT BDF REQUEST FOR LCVP'S IS A FRIVOLOUS ONE AND THAT CHIEF OF STAFF'S EXPLANATION OF INTENDED USE IS NOT STRAIGHTFORWARD. WHILE I DOUBT BAHRAINI CABINET WOULD APPROVE A FORMAL REQUEST FOR SUCH CRAFT FOR BDF, AS OPPOSED TO POLICE FORCE OR COAST GUARD, I DO NOT THINK AT THIS STAGE THAT WE SHOULD GIVE THE OFFENSIVE CAPABILITY OF LCVP'S TOO MUCH WEIGHT IN CONSIDERING THIS INFORMAL BDF PROBING. REPORTING FROM THIS EMBASSY AND DOHA OVER THE LAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS WOULD SUGGEST THAT NEITHER QATAR NOR BAHRAIN IS ITCHING FOR A FIGHT OVER HAWAR AND BAHRAIN AT LEAST IS CERTAINLY IN NO FINANCIAL POSITION TO TAKE ANY STEPS VIS-A-VIS HAWAR WHICH MIGHT IRRITATE THE SAUDIS. SHOULD GOB REACH THE POINT OF MAKING A FORMAL CABINET-APPROVED REQUEST FOR U.S. LCVP'S, WE MIGHT AT THAT TIME RECONSIDER WHETHER THE REQUEST POSES ANY SERIOUS SUBSTANTIVE PROBLEM FOR OUR OVERALL GULF POLICY. IN THE MEANTIME, WE ARE CAUGHT IN A SENSITIVE POSITION IN WHICH IT WOULD DO US NO GOOD TO APPEAR TOTALLY UNRESPONSIVE TO CROWN PRINCE AND BDF BY OUR INABILITY TO DISCUSS THE PROS

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AND CONS OF LCVP ACQUISITION ON INFORMED BASIS. IN LATEST CONVERSATION WITH EMBASSY OFFICER, CHIEF OF STAFF REITERATED THEME THAT USG APPEARS UNRESPONSIVE TO GOB WEAPONS AND TRAINING REQUESTS; GOB CANNOT SUBSTANTIATE THIS CLAIM AND BDF'S FRUSTRATION OVER ITS LACK OF GADGETRY IS SOMETHING WE CAN LIVE WITH. IT IS IMPERATIVE, HOWEVER, THAT WE NOT EXACERBATE SITUATION BY APPEARING INDIFFERENT AND UNINFORMED AS OPPOSED TO SYMPATHETICALLY UNHELPFUL. END COMMENT

4. ACTION RECOMMENDED: EMBASSY URGENTLY NEEDS INFORMATION REQUESTED MANAMA 49, PARTICULARLY SUGGESTIONS AS TO ALTERNATIVE CRAFT MORE SUITABLE FOR THE TYPE OF OPERATIONS BDF CLAIMS IT WISHES TO CARRY OUT WITH LCVP'S. WITH SUCH INFORMATION, EMBASSY OFFICER COULD RETURN TO CHIEF OF STAFF AND AMBASSADOR COULD SEE CROWN PRINCE/DEFENSE MINISTER ON THIS SUBJECT. IF BDF APPEARS PERSISTENT, AMBASSADOR COULD PRIVATELY BRIEF FOREIGN MINISTER, POINTING OUT POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS TO GOB-QATARI RELATIONS SHOULD GOB FORMALLY REQUEST AND ACQUIRE LCVP'S AND MAKING IT CLEAR THAT USG POLICY DETERMINATION MIGHT BE REQUIRED SHOULD SUCH REQUEST BE FORMALIZED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY PROCUREMENT, NAVAL SHIPS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MANAMA00130
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760047-1153
From: MANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760271/aaaackxd.tel
Line Count: 128
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 DOHA 113
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 MAY 2004 by ellisoob>; APPROVED <28 OCT 2004 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: : BAHRAINI REQUEST FOR LCVP'S
TAGS: MARR, PFOR, BA, QA, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006